A SERMON Concerning CONFESSION OF SINNES, And THE POWER OF ABSOLVTION.

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In Dei Nomine, AMEN.

1 John 1. 9.

If we confesse our sinnes, hee is faithfull and just to forgive us our sinnes, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousnesse.

IF we say that we have no sinne, wee sinne in saying so: for we give God the lye, [*ver.* 10.] who by his Prophet hath said, *There is none that doth good*, and sinneth not, and by his Apostle, *that in many things we offend all:* and we make our selves lyars, [*ver.* 8.] *If wee say that wee have no sinne, there is no truth in us; who can say I have made my heart cleane, I am pure from my sinne?* If any proud Pharisee doth, hee deceives himselfe, saith S. *Iohn. Nam si non dixeris Deo quod es, damnat in te Deus quod inveniet*, if we deny those sinnes we have, God that sees them will condemne us for them. A vainglorious Pharisee his *God I thank thee I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, &c.* will not justifie us before God. The poore Publicans humble confession, with a *God bee mercifull*

Prov. 20.

to me a ſinner, is the onely way to pardon and forgiveneſſe. For *if wee confeſſe our ſinnes, he is faithfull and juſt to forgive us our ſinnes, and to cleanſe us from all unrighteouſneſſe.*

In which words we have, Firſt, *Confeſſionis Neceſſitatem*, without confeſſion there's no remiſſion: *if* we confeſſe our ſinnes God will forgive them, not otherwiſe. Secondly, *Confeſſionis Fructus*, the fruits of confeſſion: firſt, *Condonabit Deus, if wee confeſſe our ſinnes, God will forgive us our ſinnes.* Secondly, *Purgabit ab omni iniquitate*, if we confeſſe our ſins, God *will purge us from all iniquity*; he will *forgive* us our ſinnes *non imputando pœnam*, by remitting the puniſhment due to them, and then *purgabit maculam infundendo gratiam*, he wil purge us from all iniquity by the infuſion of his grace: and that, 1. *Quia fidelis*, becauſe he is *faithfull*, he hath promiſed *that who ſo confeſſeth his ſinnes, and forſaketh them, ſhall have mercy:* ſo that if we confeſſe our ſins, his mercy will forgive them, will purge us from all iniquity, becauſe he is faithfull. 2. *quia juſtus*, Our bleſſed Saviour by his death and ſufferings hath made a full ſatisfaction for all our ſinnes, he hath paid an infinite price, for a pardon for all thoſe that will confeſſe their ſins: ſo then if we confeſſe our ſins, he will forgive them, becauſe he is *juſt*.

Prov. 28 13.

Firſt, of the firſt part, *the neceſſity of Confeſſion: if we confeſſe*, God will forgive, not otherwiſe. Confeſſion was alwayes the way to Abſolution, and never was pardon promiſed, but upon theſe termes, *if we confeſſe*. Thus it ranne in the Law; *And it ſhall bee when he ſhall be guilty in any of theſe things, that hee*

Levit. 5. 5.

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shall confesse that he hath sinned in that thing: and the Priest shall make an atonement for him concerning his sinne. Thus here in the Gospell; *If wee confesse our sinnes*, God will *forgive* them. This *si confiteamur* implyes a *non visi confiteamur*, *if wee confesse our sinnes*, God will *forgive* them, implyes that unlesse wee confesse, God will not forgive. Conditionall promises bind not to performance, till the condition be fulfilled: and such a promise is this pardon here promised with an if, *If wee confesse*. Of necessity therefore we must confesse, if ever we desire to obtaine the pardon promised. *Dum tacui inveterantur ossa mea*, saith the Psalmist: *tacuit confessionem, non tacuit miseriam.* He concealed not his misery, that he complained of all the day long, and bitterly too, his complaint was roaring; *through my roaring all the day long:* yet all this while he felt no ease, *for day and night thy hand was heavy upon me, and my moisture is like the drought in Summer: quia tacuit confessionem*, because he concealed his sins. At last he resolves to confesse, *Dixi, confitebor*; & presently came a pardon: *I said I will confesse my sins unto the Lord* ve. 5. *and so thou forgavest the iniquity of my sinne. Non vis ut ille damnet? tu damna; vis ut ille ignoscat? tu agnosce*, if we would have God forgive us, we must condemne our selves; if we would have him pardon, we must confesse. And good reason for it: should we sin & have a pardon without confessing, it could not stand with the wisedome of God, for so he should have lost the honour of his mercy: had he not required of us *confessionem peccatorum*, he had never had *confessionem gratiarum.* God therefore, that hee might be Psalme 32. 1.

ſure to have at the leaſt the thinne reward of thanks for his mercy, requires that we ſhould make known our miſery, before he would ſhew us his mercy; that we ſhould *confeſſe* our ſinnes, before he would *forgive* us our iniquities. Nor will every confeſſion ſerve the turne. Not *Pharaoh's* hypocriticall confeſſion, who in a fit of melancholy, ſayes, *I have ſinned*; but aſſoone as the hand of God was remooved, is reſolved to ſinne yet more: Nor *Sauls* ſlight confeſſion, onely leſt *Samuel* ſhould diſhonour him before the people, like ſome in S. *Auguſtins* time, who confident enough of their owne innocency, would yet with their neighbours for company ſay, *forgive us our treſpaſſes. Scio quia juſtus ſum, ſed quid dicturus ſum ante homines?* For their righteouſnes they were of the Phariſees mind, 'twas exact enough, they need not cry God mercy, yet becauſe other Publicanes ſay their prayers, they are content to ſay with them, *God bee mercifull* unto us *ſinners*, to avoide the cenſure of pride and arrogance.

1 Sam. 15.13.

Others againe worſe than theſe, are free enough to confeſſe their ſinnes, but 'its with pride and glorying. *Stulti quaſi per luſum operantur iniquitatem*, they make a ſport of committing ſinnes, and then make a jeſt of confeſſing them. This confeſſion is worſe than their other ſinnes: for either they think there is no God to regard, which is flat Atheiſme; or which is worſe, with them in the *Pſalme*, that he is full as bad as themſelves, one that delights as much to heare their impieties, as they joy either in acting or confeſſing them. No ſuch confeſſion muſt

Pſalme 50.

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wee make, if wee hope for pardon. But our confession must be better conditioned. 1. It must bee *humilis accusans nos ipsos.* Wee must accuse our selves, not laying the blame on others. 2. It must bee *pœnitens & cum dolore*, with grief and sorrow for them. 3. *Integra & perfecta*, wee must confesse all our sinnes wee know, not willingly concealing any. 4. *Cum proposito obediendi*, with a purpose of obedience for the time to come.

First our confession must bee *humilis & accusans nos ipsos*, acknowledging not the fact onely, but the guilt; confessing not onely the sinne, but confessing it to bee our owne. *If wee confesse* our *sinnes*, saith the Text. 1. *Nostra peccata, non naturæ*, our sinnes, not laying the blame on Nature. 2. *nostra peccata, non Diaboli*, not with *Eve* shifting them off to the Divell. 3. *nostra peccata, non Dei*, our sinnes, not making God the Author.——. 1.

We must confesse our sinnes, *non naturæ*, not laying the blame on nature. There were some in S. *Augustin*, that when they were convinced of their sinnes, answer'd thus for themselves, *non mirum si deditus sum fornicationi, quia talis creatus sum naturæ & fragilitatis*; no great matter if I have committed adultery, my naturall inclination tempted me to lust; and no wonder if I commit murther, my cholerick disposition forceth mee to wrath. *Fœminarum vox est*, as S. *Ierom* saith in an other case, it is a womanish excuse, and a cloake for our sloth, to say, *I could not resist*, the temptation was so strong; for wee might resist, if remembring our vow in Baptisme, wee would fight manfully against it; and it is not

not want of ſtrength, but want of will that makes us ſo eaſily vanquiſhed. *Manichæus eſt qui dicit hominem peccatum vitare non poſſe*, it was the errour of the *Manichees* to ſay that man could not avoyd ſinne. *Nos vero didicimus*, ſaith S. *Ierom*, but wee have learned from the conſtant doctrine of the Catholick Church, *hominem ſemper & peccare, & non peccare poſſe*, that at all times man may ſinne, or not ſinne if hee will. Thoſe naturall luſts and paſſions which are unavoidable, and thoſe ſuddaine motions which cannot bee prevented, are not imputed to us, God doth not charge us with them. So ſaith S. *Chryſoſtom in opere imperfecto*, upon thoſe words, *If a man lookes upon a woman, to luſt after her, hee hath committed adultery in his heart*: *Non ſi quis concupiverit ſecundùm inevitabile deſiderium carnis, ſed ſiquis concupiverit ſecundùm voluntatem animæ & conſenſum, ſtatuens implere quod cupit, ille adulter eſt.* Theſe naturall luſts are no ſinnes, if wee check and ſtopp them before they exceed the bounds of reaſon: then and not untill then are they * counted ſinnes, when we freely cheriſh thoſe deſires, and reſolve to bring them into act. And therefore when wee ſinne, wee cannot juſtly accuſe our naturall inclination, but our wills: our naturall inclinations may incline us to ſinne, but the ſinne is * ours by willingly conſenting. And therefore if wee will ſpeake truly, we muſt confeſſe our ſinnes; accuſing our ſelves, not our naturall inclination: that firſt. Secondly wee muſt confeſſe our ſinnes, acknowledging them our owne, not putting them upon the Devill: the Devill

* To wit, in Gods gracious account according to the rule of the Goſpell.

* *Rom.* 7. 17, 20.

Devill may tempt us, hee cannot force us to sinne: if hee could, wee might justly plead, they were none of *ours*, but his: but if the Devill had such power, S. *Iames* would never have said, *Resist the Devill, and he will flie from you.* Tempt us hee may by propounding outward pleasant objects to the senses, and that is *tentatio exterior*: againe he tempts by instilling secret suggestions, and that is called *tentatio interior: sed in potestate hominis est tentanti non consentire*, man hath power by the grace of God to resist those temptations, and it is our consent that giveth sinne the birth. The sinne therefore is not properly the Devils, who only tempts to it, but *ours* who freely consent and commit it. He is someway guilty of the sinne, because he is a tempter, and therefore had his curse for it, [*Gene.* 3.] but to speake properly wee are the sinners that commit the sinne. And therefore the Devills curse freed not *Eve* of hers, [*v.* 16.] nor must wee think to excuse our selves by saying, The Devill did tempt mee, and I did eat, but since the sinne is *ours*, wee must in humility confesse it; *si confiteamur peccata nostra non Diaboli*, *if* we *confesse our sinnes*, not shifting them off to the Devill: that is the second. Thirdly We must confesse *our* sins not making God the Author. *Confitebor adversùs me iniquitates meas Domino. Psal:* 32. *I will confesse my sinnes unto the Lord*, but *against my self*, not against him. S. *Augustin* upon this place complaineth of some in his time, that would confesse their sinnes, but against God, not *against themselves*: when they were told of their faults they would re-

ɔly, *Deus hoc voluit, quid ego feci?* God would have it ſo, and how could I help it? without his grace: wee cannot avoyd ſinne, and therefore if hee will not preſerve us by his grace, wee that can doe nothing without it, what offence do wee commit, wherein are we too blame? I wiſh there were not ſome amongſt us of this minde, who though they will not in plaine termes, yet *per circuitum*, in effect ſay full as much: but let them heare what S. *Auguſtin* ſayes; *Licèt nil conſequi poſſis ſine miſericordia illa quam repellis, potes tamen liberè tenere gratiam, quâ retinenda potes evitare culpam*; although wee cannot of our ſelves avoyd thoſe ſinnes without the grace of God, yet wee might, if we would have that grace which would enable us to avoid them. *Non ideo non habet homo gratiam, quia Deus non dat, ſed quia homo non accipit:* and if man hath not this grace of God, the want is not in God who freely offers, and invites us to it, but in our ſelves who wilfully refuſe it, and put it from us. *Idcirco culpa noſtra eſt, quia fugimus gratiam*; therefore when we ſinne, the ſinne is *ours*, who flie that grace which followeth us, and never leaves us but with grief; *Quoties volui & noluiſtis!* Say not thou therefore, *Hee hath cauſed mee to erre; for hee hath no need of the ſinfull man:* and let no man ſay, *Hee is tempted of God, for God cannot bee tempted to evill, neither tempts hee any man; but every man is tempted, when hee is drawne away of his owne luſts: then when luſt hath conceived, it brings forth ſinne.* Since then our luſt conceives the ſinne, we muſt needs *owne* it, and confeſſe, *if*

Eccleſ. 2.

S. Iam. 1. 14.

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wee confesse truly that the sinne is *ours*, not Gods, accusing our selves, not making God the author: and that is the third. The second condition of our confession is, it must be *pœnitens & cum dolore*. It is not enough to say, I have sinned, but with S. *Peter* we must goe out and weepe. The Saints of God they did so, *Iobs eyes poured out teares to God*, *Davids eyes gushed out a floud of waters, which made his bed to swim*. *Mary Magdalen* wept teares enough to make a bath for our Saviours feet; & S. *Ambrose* telleth us of some in his time, that did *sulcare frontẽ lachrymis*, that furrowed their face with their teares. Weeping and teares were then in fashion. *Sozomen* tells us in his 7. booke and 16. chapt. that the pœnitents then did *cum planctu & lamentatione semetipsos in terrã pronos projicere*, that they lay prostrate upon the ground *weeping & sighing*, as unworthy to look up to heaven, till the Bishop came & raised thẽ up: but this publick ἐξομολόγησις is out of fashiõ now, and 'twere vaine for me to perswade to it: but *Iob's* tears, *David's* rivers of water, *Mary Magdalen's* weeping are good patterns for us now. Or if that be too much, if our eies cannot with *Iob* poure forth tears, nor with *David* gush out rivers of water, *Nonnè stillabit oculus noster*, shall not our eye afford one drop, or twaine? there is no sin so small but would fetch a sigh from our heart, and a teare from our eye, if we wel considered whom it offended: it *greives the holy Spirit*, and shall not wee greive for greiving him? it made our blessed Saviour *sigh*, and *sweat*, and *bleed*, and *die*, and shall not we sigh for it, which made him die? it greives our heavenly father, hee

Iob 16.20. Psal.6.6.

Ephes.4.

is *sorry for our offences*, and shall not we mourne for that which makes him sorrowfull? if wee doe not, our confession is not right, not as it should be, and in vaine do wee hope for pardon, for such a drie and dull confession. It is true, *if we confesse our sinnes*, God will *forgive* them, but not unlesse we confesse, *pœnitenter & cum dolore*, with greif and sorrow: and that is the second condition of true Confession, it must be *pœnitens & cum dolore*, with grief and sorrow for our sinnes.

3. Our Confession must be *integra & perfecta*, we must not confesse by halfes, acknowledgeing some, and concealing others, but freely all that we can remember. *He that saith he hath no sinne, hath no truth in him*, saith S. *Iohn*: and hee that denyes any one sinne that hee knowes hee hath committed, hath but *little truth* in him; and the God of truth will not pardon such as will not speake the truth from their heart. All our sinnes therefore must be confessed; *omnia venialia, omnia mortalia*, so say the *Casuists*: all sinnes of weakenesse, all sinnes of presumption, all must bee confessed, if we would have God to pardon all. *Scio Deum inimicum omni crimini: quomodo ergo qui crimen reservat, de alio recipiet veniam? God is an enemie to every sinne, and will not pardon any* if wee willingly conceale but one: his pardon is generall, hee never forgives one sinne but he forgives all, and our confession must bee answerable, we must confesse not one but all, that after diligent search and examination wee finde wee have committed. For secret sinnes that have slipt out of our memory and

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cannot be recalled, God does not require a particular Confeſſion, but a generall acknowledgement in groſſe is enough: *Lord cleanſe thou mee from my ſecret ſinnes*, wipes off all thoſe. But the *Caſuiſts* put us a caſe, what if wee bee doubtfull either firſt of the fact, whether we have committed it or not; we feare wee have, but cannot certainely bee reſolved: or ſecondly of the guilt, the fact we confeſſe, but cannot with all our skill determine whether it bee a ſinne or not: willingly wee would confeſſe if wee thought it were a ſinne, but cannot be reſolved of that. Shall we now in humility downe right confeſſe that we have offended? No. *Deus non agnoſcit mendacem iſtam humilitatem, God likes not that falſe humility. Cum humilitatis cauſa mentiris, ſi non eras peccator antequam mentireris, mentiendo efficeris quod vitâras.* This very confeſſion againſt our conſcience makes us ſinners, if we were none before. What then, ſhall wee deny, it and ſay, wee have not, ſinned? No, that is full as bad or worſe. The *Caſuiſts* give us this rule, ſince the ſinne is *doubtfull*, confeſſe it ſo: if wee queſtion the fact, and cannot remember that, yet feare leſt wee have committed it, confeſſe it with a *ſi feci*, if I have done it, Lord pardon thy ſervant in this thing. Againe, if wee remember the fact, but doubt of the guilt, and cannot with all our diligence be reſolved whether it were a ſinne or not, confeſſe it then with a *ſi peccavi*, if it be a ſinne which I have committed, then *Lord bee mercifull to mee a ſinner*. Thus they teach and not without ground: for in confeſſion wee are witneſſes againſt our ſelves before the throne of

justice; and therefore must doe, what witnesses are bound to speake, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, as God shall help us. And this is the third qualification of our Confession; it must be *integra & perfecta*, wee must confesse all our sinnes, not willingly concealing any.

4. Our Confession must be *cum proposito obediendi*, with a purpose of obedience for the time to come. Not every one that confesseth, but *he that confesseth and forsaketh his sinnes shall have mercy*. As good say nothing, as say I have sinned, unlesse wee resolve to doe so no more. *Nil prodest homini confiteri, si mens ab iniquitate non revocetur*, 'tis to no purpose to confesse our sinnes, unlesse we resolve against them for the future. And as wee confesse that wee have turned from God by sinning, so wee must professe our purpose of turning to God by obedience. *Against thee, thee onely have I sinned*, saith the Psalmist; there is his confession of his sin: *Create in mee a cleane heart, ô God, and renew a right spirit within mee*; that speakes his purpose of obedience. *Lachrimavit Ephraim*; there is his contrition: *Converte me Domine, & convertar*, there is his desire of cõversion and obedience. Actuall amendment, good workes done; these are the worthy fruits of penitent Confession, no part of it: but *votum obediendi*, a purpose of amendment, a resolution of doing good workes is no fruit, but an integrall part of this confession. And therefore wee never finde any man in the way of Penance confessing his sinnes, but ever his first question is, *Quid faciam?* what must I doe? S. *Paul* his first words when he began: *Quid oportet*

Prov. 28.

Psal. 51. 4.

Ierem. 31. 18.

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me facere? the Gaolers first words when hee began to repent: *What shall wee doe?* say all the people to Saint *Iohn*, when they came to the Baptisme of Repentance. The light of reason prompts us, that as wee have wronged God, and displeased him by doing amisse, so wee must endeavour to appease him, and make him amends by doing well: As wee have dishonored him by our sinnes, so wee must endeavour a restitution, and glorifie him by our good workes; and hee confesseth not aright that wants this resolution: for true confession is not without hearty contrition, and contrition includes a vow of obedience. S. *Paul* teacheth so much. *Godly sorrow*, saith hee, *operatur timorem*, it workes a feare of offending him whom wee greive to have offended already; and *operatur vehemens desiderium*, it workes an earnest and hearty desire to please and content him, whom wee sorrow that we have displeased and injured. Here is a feare of denyall, and a desire of doing well, both which make up perfect obedience, and both these in this *godly sorrow which worketh reprentance.* So then hee that feares not to offend, that desires not to please, never sorrowed from his heart, and hee that thus never sorrowed, never truly confessed: for true confession implies contrition, and so by consequence a purpose of obedience. *Peccavi, quid faciam tibi?* it is the language of every true penitent, *I have sinned, what shall I doe unto thee ô thou preserver of men?* if burnt offerings were desired, hee would spare for no cost: *thou desirest no sacrifice, else would I give it thee.* If labour and service will content, hee will

2 Cor. 7. 11.

Iob 7. 20.

Psal. 51.

will refuſe no hardſhip: *fac me mercenarium*, ſaith the prodigall; *Father, I have ſinned, and am no more worthy to bee called thy ſonne, make me as an hired ſervant*, ſet me to task, I will willingly beare the heate and the burthen of the day to regaine thy loſt favour: or elſe *dic quid faciam, Domine?* Let God but ſay what he would have done, and he is reſolved, whatſoever God ſhall command that will he heare and do. And this is the laſt condition of confeſſion, it muſt be *cum propoſito obediendi*, with a purpoſe of obedience.

Thus have we ſeene the nature of confeſſion, and by that learne how to confeſſe: *ſed ubi confeſſarius?* where's a Confeſſor all this while? where is any to take our confeſſions? here is none in the text to confeſſe to, if we had a minde to it. None indeed expreſſely named, but here is one plainly enough deſcribed, here is one that can pardon our ſins, that can purge us from all our iniquities; and to whom can we better confeſſe, than to him that hath the power of abſolution? Would you know who this He is? *I even I*, ſaith God, *am he who blotteth out all your iniquities, and that forgiveth your ſinnes*: to him, even to him then let us confeſſe: be ſure, this is neceſſary, and no pardon to be hoped for, unleſſe we confeſſe to him at leaſt. But there is another Confeſſor that would not be neglected. *Qui confiteri vult, ut inveniat gratiam, quærat ſacerdotem, ſcientem ſolvere & ligare*, ſaith S. *Auguſtin*; He that would be ſure of pardon, let him ſeeke out a Prieſt, and make his humble confeſſion to him; for God, who alone hath the prime and originall right of forgiving ſinnes, hath

Iſa. 43. 25.

hath delegated the Priests his Judges here on earth, and given them the power of absolution; so that they can in his name, forgive the sinnes of those that humbly confesse unto them. But is not this *blasphemy*, said the Scribes once? Is it not *Popery*, say some with us now? Take the counsell that is given in *Iob, cap.8. verse 8. Enquire of the former generations, ask the Fathers, and they shall tell thee.*

Ask then S. *Chrysostom*, and heare what he saith in his fifth Homilie, upon these words of *Esay*, *I saw the Lord sitting upon a Throne.* What is comparable (saith he) to the power of the Priest, to whom Christ hath said, *Whatsoever ye shall binde on earth, shall be bound in heaven, and whatsoever yee shall loose on earth, shall be loosed in heaven.* ἀπὸ τῆς γῆς τὴν ἀρχὴν τῆς κρίσεως λαμβάνει ὁ οὐρανὸς, ἐπειδὰν ὁ κριτὴς ἐν τῇ γῇ καθήται, ὁ δεσπότης ἕπεται τῷ δούλῳ, καὶ ἅπερ ἂν οὗτος κάτω κρίνει, ταῦτα ὁ κύριος ἄνω κυροῖ. Heaven waites and expects the Priests sentence here on earth: for the Priest sits Iudge on earth, the Lord followes the servant, and what the servant binds or looses here on earth, *clave non errante*, that the Lord confirmes in heaven: words so cleare for the *judiciary* formall Absolution of the Priest, as nothing can be said more plaine. Please you next to enquire of St. *Ierom*, who is said to be the Patron of that opinion, that holds the Priests power barely *declarative*, and so indeed, none at all: yet he speaks home, in his Epistle *ad Heliodorum de vita solitaria.* God forbid, saith he, that I should speake a word amisse against the Priests, *Qui sacro ore corpus Chri-*

sti conficiunt, that is in the holy Eucharist; *per quos nos Christiani sumus*, that is in Baptisme; *Qui claves regni cælorum habentes, quodammodo ante diem judicii judicant*, that is by remitting or retaining sinnes. He that can *construe judicant*, and understand what it signifies, needs no comment upon the words. Heare next what S. *Gregorie* the great saies in his 26 *Homil.* upon the Gospells, *Apostoli principatum supremi judicii sortiuntur, ut vice Dei quibusdam peccata retineant, quibusdam relaxent*; the Apostles and in them all Priests were made Gods Vicegerents here on earth, in his name to retaine and forgive sinnes, not *declaratively* onely, but *judicially: animarum judices fiunt*, as he goes on, they are made the Iudges of the soules of men, casting the obstinate downe to the gates of Hell, by the fearefull power of excommunication, and lifting the penitent into Heaven by the blessed power of Absolution. And he is no better than a *Novatian* that denies it, saith S. *Ambrose*. I could name more Fathers, as S. *Augustin*, S. *Cyprian* and others, but I spare. These I have nam'd, are enough to give testimony of the former generation, men too pious to be thought to speake *blasphemie*, and too ancient to be suspected of *Popery*. But to put all out of doubt, let's search the Scriptures; looke into the 20th. of S. *Iohn*, *ver.* 23. *Whose soever sinnes yee remit, they are remitted unto them. and whose soever sins ye retaine, they are retained:* here is plainly a power of remitting sinnes granted to the Priest, by our blessed Saviour. Nor can it be understood of remitting sinnes by *preaching* as some expound it, nor by *baptizing*,

in Psal. 38.

baptizing, as others gueſſe. For both theſe, *preach* and *baptize*, they could doe long before: but this power of remitting they receiv'd not till now, that is, after his reſurrection. That they could preach and baptize before, 'tis plaine. *Preach* they might, they had a licence for it; S. *Matth* 10. 7. *As yee goe, preach, ſaying, &c.* and *baptize* they could and did, *Iohn* 4. 2. *Though Ieſus himſelfe baptized not, but his Diſciples.* But this power of remiſſion in the text, they receiv'd not till now, (that is after his reſurrection) as appeares, firſt by the ceremony of *breathing*, by that ſignifying that then he infus'd that power into them which he bade them receive; and ſecondly by the word *receive*, which he could not properly have uſed if they had beene endued with it before. So then it is not the power of preaching, or baptizing which is here given the Apoſtles, but as the Fathers interpret the place, a peculiar power of pronouncing, as Gods deputed Iudges, pardon and remiſſion to the penitent, a power of abſolving from ſinnes, in the name of God all ſuch as penitently confeſſe unto them: a forme of which Abſolution our holy Mother the Church, hath preſcribed in the viſitation of the Sick. He then that aſſents to the Church of *England*, or beleeves the Scriptures, or gives credit to the ancient Fathers, cannot deny the Prieſt the power of remitting ſinnes: and ſince he can in the name of God forgive us our ſins, good reaſon we ſhould make our confeſſion to him. Surely God never gave the Prieſt this power in vaine: he gave it for our benefit, and expects that we ſhould doe the beſt we can to make uſe of it, having

ving ordained in the Priest the power of absolution, he requires that we should use the best meanes we can to obtaine that blessing. Now the only meanes to obtaine this absolution, is our confession to him. The *Priest* may not, nor cannot absolve any but the penitent, nor can he know their penitence, but by their outward expression: it is Gods prerogative to know the thoughts of the heart, the Priests eye cannot pierce so farre, he onely reades the sorrowes of our hearts by our outward confession, without the which we cannot receive, nor he give the benefit of absolution. *Pœnitentiam igitur agite, qualis agitur in Ecclesiâ*, Confesse as the Church directs us, confesse to God, confesse also to the Priest, if not in private, in the eare, since that is out of use, (*male aboletur*, saith a devout Bishop, 'tis almost quite lost, the more the pitty;) yet how ever, confesse as the Church appoints, publickly before the Congregation, that so we may at least by this reap the great benefit of absolution. And if we slight this, heare what S. *Augustin* saies, *Tom.* 10. *Hom.* 49. *Nemo sibi dicat, Occulte ago, quia apud Deum ago, &c.* Let no man flatter himselfe, and say, *I confesse in private to God*, and God that knowes my heart will pardon me, though I never at all confesse to the Priest. *Ergo sine causa dictum esset, Quæ solveritis in terra, &c.* Hath God in vaine said, *whose sinnes yee remit, they are remitted?* hath God in vaine given the Priest the power of the Keyes? *Frustramus ergo verbum Dei?* shall wee by our wilfull neglect goe about to make void the promise of Christ? God forbid! If we have offended this way already, *præ-*

veniamus

veniamus judicium Dei per confessionem, the onely way to prevent the terrible judgement of the last day, is timely to confesse our sinne to God, and to the *Priest*. For, if we confesse in humility our sinnes with *griefe* and *sorrow* for them; if wee confesse them *faithfully*, not concealing any, and with a *purpose of amending* our lives: be our sinnes what can be, they cannot be so great, so grievous, but God will forgive them. S. *Ambrose* doubts not, but *Judas* sinne as great as it was, might have beene forgiven if he had confessed to his Saviour, as he did to the Iews, *I have sinned in betraying innocent bloud.* Say not then with *Cain*, *My sinne is greater than can be forgiven:* for if thou canst confesse it aright, never feare forgiveneſſe, unlesse thou conceivest (which is impossible) that it is greater, than either the truth, or justice of God: for *if wee confesse our sinnes, hee is faithfull, and just to forgive us our sinnes*, saith the text. Nor say, I have sinned too often to be forgiven, *Numerus non vincit gratiam*, the number of our sinnes cannot exceed his mercy: if we sinned a thousand times, confesse as oft, and hee that hath commanded us to forgive our brother, as *oft as hee shall repent*, will certainly forgive us. The text is not if we confesse *once or twice* he will forgive us, but indefinite, *if we confesse our sins*, how great soever, how often soever committed, *he is faithfull and just, to forgive us our sinnes.* If we with the prodigall confesse, *Father I have sinned against heaven and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy sonne*, the Father of mercies will behold us with the eye of pitty, will melt us with his grace, embrace us with the

the armes of mercy, will owne us for his sonnes, and cloath us with the robes of righteousnesse, and lastly will *slay the fatted Calfe* that we may eat and be merry: our blessed Saviour who was slaine from the beginning of the world, shall be slaine as it were a fresh in the Sacrament, that wee *eating his flesh*, and *drinking his precious blood*, may be made *merry* with the taste of those joyes here, with which we shall be fully satisfied hereafter. Amen.

To God the Father, God the Sonne, God the Holy Ghost, be all honour, and glory, praise and thanksgiving, both now and evermore,

AMEN.

FINIS.